DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 123 983 HE 007 786

AUTHOR Choi, Jae W.; Lyons, Paul R.
TITLE Resource Agent for Planning Management: A Role for Institutional Research.
INSTITUTION Frostburg State Coll., Md.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Planning; *Higher Education; *Institutional Research; *Management Development; Models; *Researchers; Staff Utilization

ABSTRACT

The resource agent role by the institutional researcher is not unique, but the structuring of this role within the framework of a planning management model is rather uncommon. This document attempts to: (1) present a conceptualization of a particular role for institutional researchers; (2) to define the planning management model within which the role may be actualized; and (3) to describe a particular instance in which the Institutional Research Office and the planning management model were utilized. (Author/KE)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED123983

RESOURCE AGENT FOR PLANNING MANAGEMENT: A ROLE FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

by

Jae W. Choi
Frostburg State College

Paul R. Lyons
Frostburg State College

Introduction

This paper serves to inform institutional researchers and others of a particular role which may be assumed by an institutional researcher -- that of resource agent for planning and analysis. The resource agent role by the institutional researcher is not unique, of course, but the structuring of this role within the framework of a planning management model is rather uncommon.

The content of this paper represents an attempt to do three things: (1) to present a conceptualization of a particular role for institutional researchers; (2) to define the planning management model within which the role may be actualized; and (3) to describe a particular instance in which the Institutional Research Office and the planning management model were utilized.

The institutional researcher generally attempts various kinds of basic as well as applied research analysis. However, the role he structures for himself to fit within the framework of a planning management model, by working as a resource agent in helping certain staff members accept the role of change agent in an ad hoc setting, may be a useful departure from the norm.

HE 007 786

In recent days formal and informal planning activities in colleges and universities are more frequently taking place than in the past. Planning defined here is a process through which activities are directed toward establishing goals, directions, and means, for the institution over time. In many small colleges and universities planning is done in an ad hoc setting, mostly due to financial

and staff constraints. In order to help staff manage planning tasks, there should be a workable guideline by which an individual, conceptually as well as actually, may follow the planning process until the task is completed. A carefully developed guideline can be represented in a planning model as demonstrated in this paper.

Role Specification

The role of the Institutional Research Office at Frostburg State College as in many post-secondary institutions is rather broadly defined with emphasis placed upon the functions of providing information and institutional data to executives and the administrative staff. Information and data are usually obtained from the execution of special studies, analytical in nature, aimed at enhancing managerial performance and effectiveness.

With the exception of some college and university institutional research offices, most institutional research offices also serve various institutional constituencies in a resource capacity particularly in the areas of departmental research projects of both an academic and organizational nature, by providing research design and data base design. The "real world" of public policy decisions have, of late and in an increasing manner, been forcing colleges and universities to become more circumspect with regard to short- and long-range commitments of institutions. Such commitments are expressed in staffing, programs, facilities, equipment, and time as said commitments relate to meeting clientele needs. In short, planning activities, formal and informal, are taking place much more in today's colleges and universities than has been the case in the past. Planning occurs in many levels of an organization and in many ways.

Planning, as we know it, can occur in a highly formal or informal setting and may be a highly structured activity or a loosely structured one. We find that as defined above, planning is often done on an ad hoc basis at many institutions. This is due, in part, to the fact that colleges simply cannot afford to hire outside

consultants, moderators and the like to help complete planning tasks in this era of "tight" money.

Having been asked to participate in several of these planning activities over time and having been made cognizant of the general lack of knowledge possessed by many individuals regarding the planning process, the Office of Institutional Research at Frostburg State College decided to develop a planning management model, one that could be used by individuals charged with planning responsibilities (usually in an ad hoc setting) and one that was built, in part, around the resource capabilities of the Office of Institutional Research. It is believed that the planning management model presented herein has several positive features among which are:

a. a structured, yet flexible format for planning;
b. a relatively simple conceptualization of the planning process;
c. a comprehensive overview of the process of planning;
d. the usefulness of the model as an in-service educational device; and
e. a specification of the ways in which the Institutional Research Office may serve the particular planning effort.

In essence, this resource role of the Institutional Research Office is promulgated as part of the planning management model. It is assumed that, by providing a model as a guide and assisting the planning group within the framework of the model, that efficiency is enhanced as well as the likelihood of more realistic and rational planning.

The Planning Model

There is a considerable body of research, commentary, and documented experience which deals, in some detail, with group planning processes including activities, attitudes, tools, and designs (Casasco, 1970; Hostrop, 1973). Much of this material treats planning as a relatively mechanistic as well as impersonal activity. Planning, however, if carried out in a group setting, is not an impersonal activity and if the planning manager or institutional researcher fail to recognize this basic condition

he is likely to color his interaction in a group planning process as a manipulator rather than as a facilitator.

The planning model presented here is by no means intended to be the last word in planning design. It is tied to a fundamental set of assumptions which tend to be derived from experience particularly in post-secondary educational institutions. These assumptions are listed here:

1. The planning model is intended to serve as an aid in group planning activities in an ad hoc (temporary) setting.
2. The individual responsible for completion of the planning task in such a setting need not be (and usually is not) expert in planning management nor in planning activities.
3. The group members have had little or no formal training or experience in planning.

The planning model can, perhaps, best be defined and described vis-a-vis figures 1, 2, and 3.

Figure 1

DIMENSIONS OF PLANNING MODEL

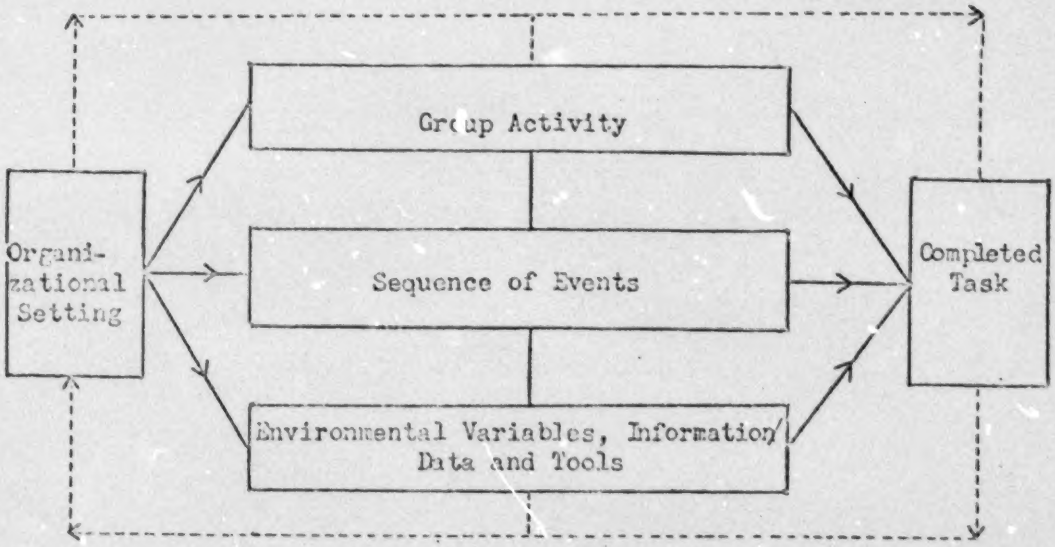


Figure 1 depicts the major dimensions of the model. The entire planning process consists of a series of sequential events, each involving certain types of information and data, and the like to be manipulated, analyzed, and synthesized by the planning group. An event is a tentative fluid entity given dimension by group activity. The planning process, in this case, consists of a series of consecutive and intermediate events loosely strung together. Each event serves to develop forthcoming reference points which are subject to modification or revision over the term of the planning process as the planning group "zeros-in" on task completion.

Figure 2

MAJOR PHASES OF PLANNING MODEL

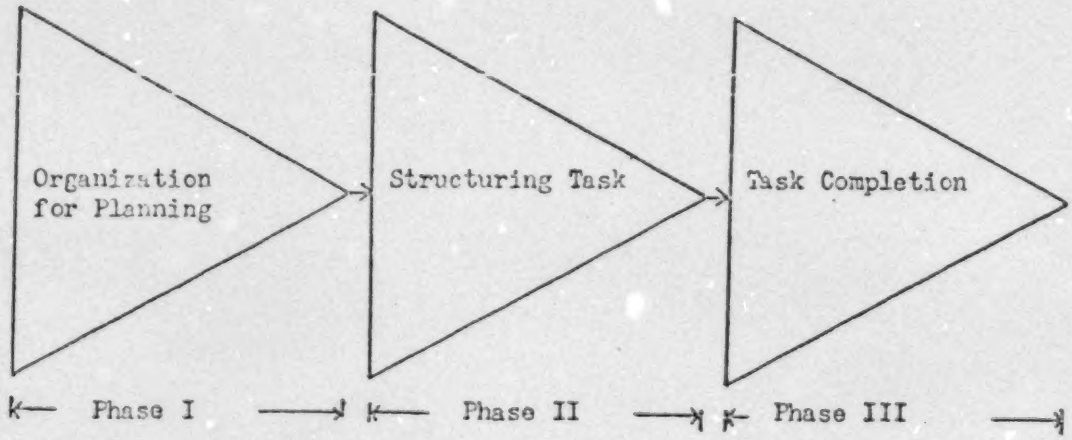
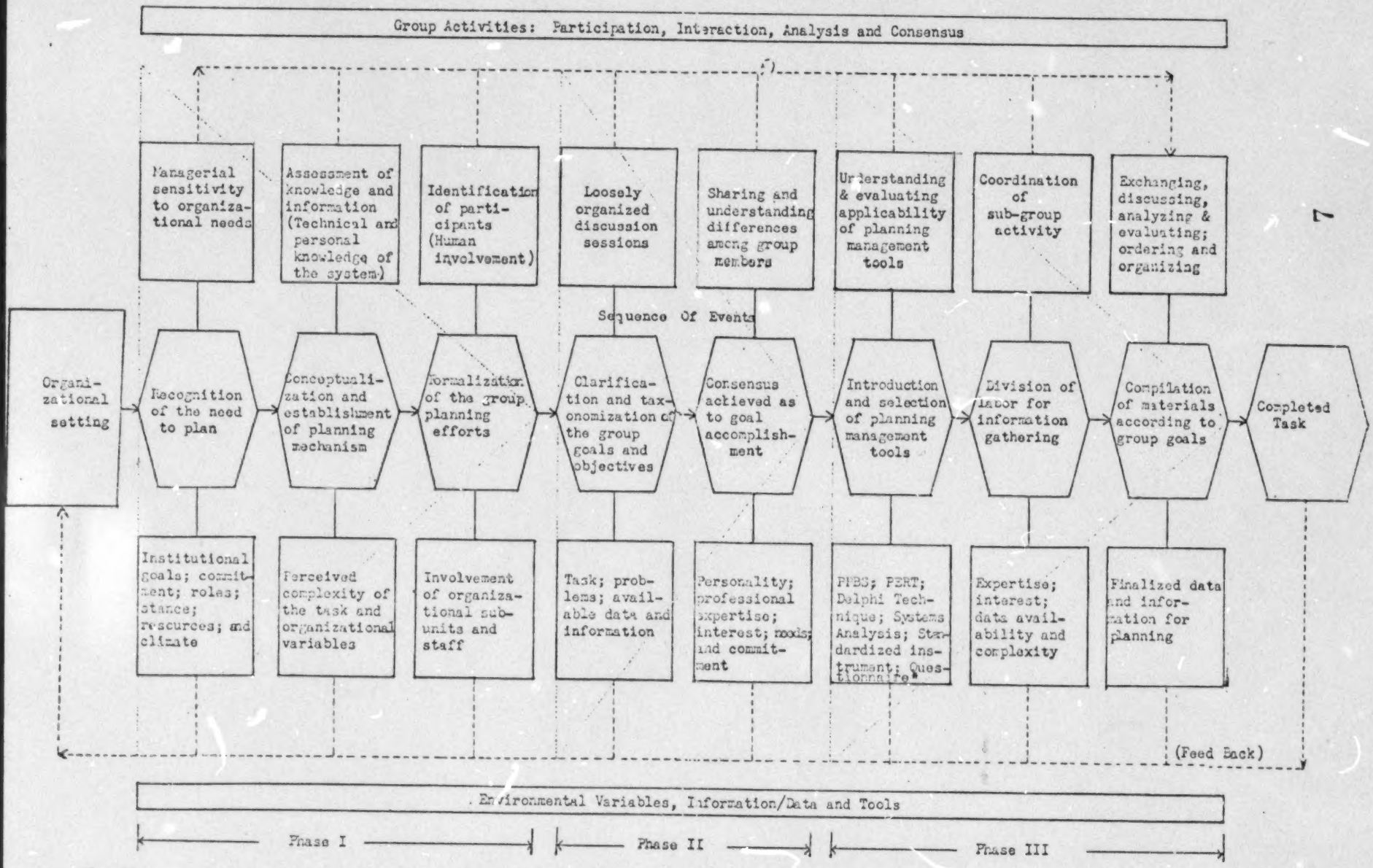


Figure 3

A GENERAL MODEL FOR PLANNING MANAGEMENT


Group Activities: Participation, Interaction, Analysis and Consensus
Managerial sensitivity to organizational needs
Assessment of knowledge and information (Technical and personal knowledge of the system)
Identification of participants (Human involvement)
Loosely organized discussion sessions
Sharing and understanding differences among group members
Understanding & evaluating applicability of planning management tools
Coordination of sub-group activity
Exchanging, discussing, analyzing & evaluating; ordering and organizing
Sequence Of Events
Organizational setting
Recognition of the need to plan
Conceptualization and establishment of planning mechanism
Formalization of the group planning efforts
Clarification and taxonomization of the group goals and objectives
Consensus achieved as to goal accomplishment
Introduction and selection of planning management tools
Division of labor for information gathering
Compilation of materials according to group goals
Completed Task
Institutional goals; commitment; roles; stance; resources; and climate
Perceived complexity of the task and organizational variables
Involvement of organizational sub-units and staff
Task; problems; available data and information
Personality; professional expertise; interest; needs; and commitment
PPBS; PERT; Delphi Technique; Systems Analysis; Standardized instrument; Questionnaire*
Expertise; interest; data availability and complexity
Finalized data and information for planning
(Feed Back)
Environmental Variables, Information/Data and Tools
Phase I
Phase II
Phase III

*Locally prepared data gathering devices including interviewing.

In Figure 2 we find the three distinctive phases which overlay the sequence of events. They are:

Phase I Organization for Planning

Phase II Structuring the Task

Phase III Task Completion

These phases are superimposed on the model (Figure 3) with dotted lines. Figure 3 represents an elaboration of the dimensions of the model presented in Figure 1. The model presented in Figure 3 is a linear one nested within feedback loops; that is, the entire planning process is viewed as a flow of events nesting within an interdependent network of feedback loops. Each of the three major phases of the process is viewed as a series of specific events developed from activities which have begun with very broad, general notions and ideas, with each specific event terminating in a set of decisions. The decisions associated with the activity occurring in each event combine over the life of the particular phase in question to comprise a phase termination point (albeit fluid) which may be construed as the signal to commence activities associated with the next phase.

By way of example, we find in Figure 3 that the major events of Phase I: Organization for Planning are:

1. Recognition of the Need to Plan,
2. Conceptualization and Establishment of the Planning Mechanism, and
3. Formalization of Group Planning Efforts

The decisions made during each event tend to combine and help to develop a highly specific set of decision points (in this case, the identification of planning group members) which serves as the jumping-off place for the next phase, Structuring the Task (what the group is to do). Of course, decision points may be modified within the feedback loop structure as a more definite path is routed by the planners.

Planning, like most organizational activities, requires management. There should be a design for planning as well as some attempt to establish criteria for

the evaluation of the planning effort. Gathering a group of individuals together for the purpose of planning should, by itself, be the result of a planned set of activities and events.

The person responsible for execution of the planning task (planning manager) can help to assure that the planning effort will be worthwhile by giving careful consideration as to how the planning effort may be initially organized. He should have a reasonably good understanding of the information/data base that is available or that could be made available to planners. This is an area in which institutional research can play a vital role. The planning manager needs an awareness of the kinds and types of personal, organizational, and environmental variables with which the planning group may deal. He needs some perception of and some perspective on the complexity of the planning task. Again, the institutional research office can be of great assistance to the planning manager as the latter attempts to gain an understanding of the situation.

In many instances a senior professor is selected or elected to chair a committee (ad hoc) charged with developing a plan or plans for future activity. One can assert that it is a given fact that individual knowledge of and familiarity with planning tools and techniques is bound to diminish as new tools are being developed, borrowed, and adopted from disciplines such as economics, business, space science, military science and so on. It is difficult enough for an individual who has close contact with the field of organization and institutional planning and analysis to keep abreast of these developments. It is folly to expect the average institutional member to have an awareness and understanding of more than a few tools, techniques, and systems such as "PERT," "MBO," "MBE," "GERT," "DELPHI," "RRPM," "PPBS," "MIS," and the like. In order to be selective of and make use of these kinds of aids the planning manager needs help. This is not to say that the planning group must make use of these aids. The group may want to be aware of the existence of these aids since they offer a systematic framework

for launching major dimensions of the planning effort.

Perhaps that phase of the planning process when the institutional researcher may have the most influence in the planning group and be of the most value to the group is the second phase which centers on task structuring. Essentially what takes place in this phase is the beginnings of interactions of planning group members which move toward a "zeroing-in" on the specific task to be accomplished. The task takes on dimension and structure, the group defines and re-defines its mission and objectives and, finally, group consensus is attained with regard to expected task achievement. A lot of questions arise. What are we do do?; What do we really know about the organization, its present goals and objectives? How well it is meeting them? How do we define our purpose? What information and data are available? How do we get it, analyze it, use it? What specific things are we to do? Many of these questions can be served by the institutional researcher, for they touch upon the various dimensions of his own functioning within the organization.

In terms of initial group discussion, all problems with respect to the organization's operations and aspirations must be articulated. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization? What are the organizational and environmental constraints and their effects on goal achievement? How great are the gaps between present goal attainment and aspired level of attainment? These questions might be delineated, categorically, and a problem taxonomy might be developed. This could serve to develop a basis or foundation for planning. Analysis should take the following kinds of variables into account:

A. Historical Data

B. Organizational Philosophy and Goals (What Is and What Should Be)

C. Basic Needs of Organization's Members (Students, faculty and staff)

D. Program Evaluation

E. Specific Functions and Objectives of Organization Sub-Units

F. Identification of Current Conditions and Trends (internal and external)

G. Identification of Conditions and Trends Likely to Impact on the Future of the Organization

H. Identification and Enumeration of Organizational Strengths and Weaknesses (What are criteria for such valuations)

The planning manager needs to work ceaselessly to eliminate ambiguity from the scene; for it has been found that the more ambiguity that is present in a task environment, the greater the likelihood of increasing conformity behavior (Sherif and Sherif, 1956). With a group attempting to define its mission and purpose for outlining required activities, conformity as to purpose in the final stages of discussion is, of course, desirable. In the formative stages of the planning effort a highly differentiated array of opinions and ideas is most desirable. In a resource capacity the institutional researcher can serve to reduce ambiguity due, most likely, to his knowledge of and access to a wide variety of specific information concerning the institution. The inclusion of the institutional researcher in the planning effort also serves to add another dimension to the mix of group membership in the sense of unique personality and in the sense of an information source.

In being able to point to correct and efficient use of data and information and planning tools, the institutional researcher not only can help to reduce ambiguity for planning group members but also he or she can serve to diminish the likelihood of what has come to be called (in group dynamics parlance) "risky-shift." Much research has been done in the area of risky-shift but the phenomenon is still largely unexplained. In essence, risky-shift pertains to a willingness on the part of a group to make riskier decisions than would be made by individuals working alone. Many experimental studies have demonstrated the existence of this phenomenon (Ziller, 1957; Wallach, Kogan, and Burt, 1965). The present authors are of the opinion that, in a planning task, heightened ambiguity in a

complex task environment increases the risk assumed by group members in decision-making. Assuming that the institutional researcher strives to reduce ambiguity one might expect less risky decisions to be made on the part of group members. Relative degrees of risk may or may not be associated with quality of decisions or organizational health.

An Application

In order to enhance efficiency of group operations and to enhance the product of the planning group the authors collaborated (one representing the institutional research office, the other representing the planning manager) to structure the planning process involving six other individuals whose charge was to develop short- and long-range plans for the College's graduate program. The plans were to be comprehensive in nature and were to be presented as recommendations to the College's graduate faculty.

Collaborative efforts materialized during the beginning stages of phase 2 (see Figure 3) when group members were seeking answers to basic questions regarding their charge. Using the fundamental concepts and constructs of systems analysis, the institutional researcher attempted to give dimension to the planning task. System properties, boundaries, and the like, were discussed and group members defined, via a give-and-take discussion mode, the parameters of the planning task. Next came the questions regarding the information required to formulate alternatives for the future. Discussion of various data bases and information gathering devices; identification of significant research and reports on the future of higher education and graduate education; a series of discussions on assumption-building; and other related activities were the next order of business.

The planning group, over time, had developed through group consensus a way of coming to view the future. They posed questions, identified the kinds of data and information needed in order to help answer the questions and had at least a skeleton outline of the form in which these responses could be organized to form

a comprehensive system of recommendations.

Institutional research played a vital role in being able to provide background data and information, assisting with design and analysis of a regional (clientele) needs assessment, implementation and analysis of the Educational Testing Service's Institutional Goals Inventory used with sub-populations both internal and external to the institution, and in a most instructive way by acquainting group members with a variety of methods and systems useful in organizing group effort and in charting a course of action.

Was the effort successful? If one examines the tangible product of the planning group (a written document) and compares it with other similar in-house documents, one soon learns that the recent effort is more specific, less vague, deals in operational terms to a greater degree, and is more representative of a system of ideas emanating from a central core of ideas than earlier attempts at planning. If these attributes are of positive value, then the effort was relatively successful. This is content validity. Another form of validity accrues when one's peers and colleagues (who are not connected with the effort) acclaim the quality, the thoroughness and the perceived veracity of the product. This has occurred. Perhaps the greatest value of the effort is the personal acceptance of the product by planning group members and their willingness to engage in meaningful discussion with other organization members to attempt to enlighten them as to the content and intent of the recommendations. There has been (subjectively observed) a minimum of defensiveness on the part of the planning group members with regard to the product. The product is based upon a system of ideas developed from a scientific framework. The emergent product, by design, is rational, organized and requires little defense.

References

Casasco, J. A. Corporate Planning Models for University Management. Washington, D.C.: E.R.I.C. Clearinghouse on Higher Education, George Washington University, 1970.

Hostrop, Richard W. Managing Education for Results. Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publications, 1973.

Sherif, M. and Sherif, C. W. An Outline of Social Psychology. (revised edition) New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1956.

Ziller, R. C. "Four Techniques of Group Decision-Making Under Uncertainty." Journal of Applied Psychology, 1957, 41, pp. 384-388.

Wallach, M. A., Kogan, N. and Burt, R. B. "Can Group Members Recognize the Effects of Group Discussion Upon Risk Taking?" Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1965, 1, pp. 379-395.